



Challenges in Recruitments

— Shantanu Saha

There were two very divergent reasons for me to leave a cushy corporate job as a Vice President - Human Resources as early as just 9 years into my professional career and jump into the tidal wave of the rapidly growing recruitment industry.

One, I was fascinated by the huge amount of revenue I managed to generate for this sector by simply changing my job; it seemed a trifle too easy. Secondly, as a Head of the hiring function for a few years, I had noticed the sheer lack of professionalism in the dealings with the typical recruitment agencies and I really wanted to change the way a typical "placement agency" functioned.

In fact it's amazing to know that the recruitment and staffing industry has such a huge spread and width that from a simple housewife to a global fortune 500 corporation happen to be in the same business. It's a business that needs not much by virtue of qualifications, virtually zero investment and a person can simply convert their household PC and home phone into a business proposition by efficient networking and usage of the net. This probably has become a double edged sword and is perhaps a reason why recruitment agencies are taken quite lightly by many companies, unlike many other professionals like Chartered Accountants, Lawyers, Management Consultants etc.

In fact, it's a sad state of affairs the way companies approach recruitments in India today.

Most companies have a knee jerk reaction to fulfilling any vacancy. Here are some scenarios that typically happen:-

A business leader acquiring a new business suddenly faces a contractual commitment to be made to a client stating the days in which he would start delivering. He does a quick calculation and agrees to an unrealistic timeframe and then calls up his HR head to meet the numbers within a deadline that has already been committed. The HR folks go crazy and call up all agencies in their list and ask for resumes by the very next day. Feeble attempts by the agency to get job

specifications are met with - "I am sure being in this profession you would understand our needs". It then becomes a rat race among agencies to log on to job sites, pick the resumes and send it to the client. It becomes a scenario of "fastest fingers first" and the casualty in all of this is both the interest of the company and the interest of potential candidates. Once the shortlist comes in the agencies use their best selling skills to push a candidate into a job that may or may not fit into his / her career aspirations / goals. The end result - if the person does get hired - he may not last long in the job, creating a vacancy soon enough which will again create a business requirement for the recruitment agency.

The second scenario that I have witnessed is where a decent recruitment agency tries its level best to do a quality job and sends candidates that best fit the profile professionally and aspirationally, but the client having met this candidate comes back saying - "Very Good Candidate, but can't decide by meeting just one or two people. Please send some more like him or her." Often enough in such a scenario, when the client after meeting more candidates decides to come back to first good one, the guy has taken up another offer. Companies need to realize, that if a candidate is looking out and if the person is good, it will not be long before he gets picked up by any good firm. In such a scenario, both the firm that loses out and the recruitment agency that put in all the effort to identify a "One shot hire" lose out and typically the agency gets de-motivated. Next time around, the agency might get around this situation by sending some below average profiles along with the good profile to make sure the client has the satisfaction of choosing among many. The client ends up as a loser as it wastes more management time to come to the same decision.

If they had in the first place considered the recruitment agency as an equal partner they would have trusted their judgement when the agency said that this was the best candidate available. Here I am not suggesting the client give up its right to see more people, but where they find the

candidate suitable, they should not defer a decision simply because it was the first person they met.

Another situation is where the client feels it's entirely the job of the recruitment agency to build a rapport with a prospective candidate and convince the person about the prospective company. It is as much a role of the company itself to make sure they "wow" the candidate and make a good pitch. In today's scenario the number of quality candidates is dwindling and the opportunities available to these quality candidates are numerous.

In such a scenario it's essential that the company having identified the right candidate go all out to build a bond in the pre-hiring stage so that they do not end up with a situation where on the date of joining they realize that the candidate has changed his mind. This is possible if the hiring manager, or the person to whom the candidate is to report make efforts to stay in touch with the candidate during the entire pre-joining process, helping the person answer all his queries / apprehension and smoothening out any bureaucratic requirements that need to be cleared.

I remember a case in my career where I had offers from three companies, two were established players and one was a startup. The HR Head of the startup created not only a great impression about that firm, but after giving the offer introduced me to some key personnel and actually came till the parking lot to see me off. In fact the bond that he created on that first day itself made it very difficult to discount this company vis a vis the established players and after a week this was the company I chose to join.

Finally, companies need to have efficient hiring processes. We frequently come across companies where a candidate meets four to five people before any decision is taken. Companies say that they are just being diligent and making sure that they make the right decision. However mostly this is the result of poor delegation, inability to trust others and ones own judgement and the hope to make sure that there are many folks to share the blame in case a wrong hiring decision is made.

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Many times these interviews are spread across many days and at times so poorly organized that the candidate by the end of the whole process has second thoughts about the company. In fact at times the hiring processes tend to be so poorly managed that all those who are not selected make sure they spread the word the company is very unprofessional in spite of the fact that the company does a great job in it's core business area.

Companies must realize that each candidate irrespective of whether he/she is hired or not acts as a brand ambassador of the company. It's thus very essential to create a wow experience that leaves the candidate with a feeling that this is a great company and even if he / she did not clear the interview this time, they aspire to work for this firm in future. Such candidates will communicate the same about their experience to their friends and relatives. This would in the long run help the company get candidates much more easily than otherwise.

In fact candidates with a bad hiring experience in most cases share that with

friends and family and would pro-actively stop someone from attending interviews in such companies and the company would not even realize that they miss out on a lot of good candidates because of a poor hiring process.

Another very disturbing situation in most companies is where the recruiters act as postmen to the management or to the department for whom they hire. Not only does the organization not share a job description with the recruitment agency, but the recruiters managing the hiring process with the organization have a very poor understanding of the requirement. This leads to a situation where they can neither understand the queries of the recruitment agency or of prospective candidates. Hence they end up saying that they will check and get back leading to further delays in the process or worse still giving an incorrect answer leading the recruitment agency on the wrong path.

To solve the above problem, in one of the companies I worked for, I successfully implemented a system. In this system each department / manager raising a manpower

requirement filled a job requisition form which had KRA's and KSA's specified with the 5 points max. and each KRA and KSA was given a percentage so that they added up to 100%. This information along with other basic information like qualifications, experience, constraints etc was taken as an input from the person who knew best about the position. An approved Job Requisition was passed on the recruitment agency and in turn to prospective candidates. This made the whole hiring process so transparent that everyone from recruiters in the company, to the recruiters in the recruitment firm and to the candidates had absolute clarity on the role. Going forward the same document was used as an input in the appraisal of the candidate making sure the candidate knows what is expected from him and his / her evaluation parameters even before he/she was hired.

I have through this article tried to share some of the experiences / challenges I have faced both as a part of an HR team in the corporate and as a part of the Recruitment industry in India. I sincerely hope that it helps readers identify situations in their own firms and address those issues wherever possible. 